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Abstract

Posting about Advent traditions and celebrations from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/advent-traditions-what-are-we-waiting-for/>

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in things

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Advent Traditions: What Are We Waiting For?

April Fiet, Kayt Frisch, and Kristin Kobes Du Mez

According to its translation from Latin, Advent means “coming,” and throughout this season we enter in a time of waiting for the celebration of Christ’s coming into the world on Christmas Day. Typically, couples and families establish traditions in this time of waiting to build anticipation for Christmas. We asked our Editorial Board what traditions were important to them; April Fiet, Kristin Kobes Du Mez, and Kayt Frisch weigh in on how they keep Christ at the center of the season of Advent.

April Fiet

When we were in seminary, my husband and I were so touched by the hospitality of the seminary president and his wife who invited us into their home every St. Nicholas Day weekend to celebrate and enjoy each other’s company. Hospitality has always been important to me, but after experiencing their hospitality and generosity, we decided that we wanted to model our ministry on the kind of hospitality that his family showed to us.

Every year on the weekend closest to St. Nicholas Day (December 6), we invite our congregation to our home. We eat too many Christmas cookies, drink a whole lot of wassail, tell the story of Bishop Nicholas of Myra, and sing songs together. It is one of my favorite weekends of the whole year.

One particularly hectic and strenuous year, we thought we needed a break from the busyness of the season, so we decided not to host a St. Nicholas Party that year. We missed it so much that we decided we never wanted to go another Advent season without inviting everyone to our home. It simply isn't Advent without a St. Nicholas Party.

In the weeks before the party, we make a handmade ornament for every person or family who plans to attend, and we have lots of fun finding new ways to make creative ornaments to share. We have made ornaments from old puzzle pieces as well as plastic canvas squeeze-um ornaments. We have even made Christmas pickle ornaments.

Throughout the season of Advent, we remember the importance of making room—room for giving, room for love, and room for people. I think that is why we try to cram so many parties into this season of the year. We want to have room for being together. Sometimes all of that party-throwing can make the season too busy and stressful, but St. Nicholas weekend is usually early enough in Advent that the wonder and expectation of it all is still fresh. Eyes are still sparkling. Smiles are still joyful. And Advent still has all the possibilities of what is to come.

This year will be our tenth St. Nicholas party, and I am so excited. I can hardly wait!

Kristin Kobes Du Mez

Our family's favorite advent book is Gayle Boss's *All Creation Waits: The Advent Mystery of New Beginnings*. The book is gorgeously written and lavishly illustrated, and it opens up Advent in a stunningly original way. It contains twenty-five meditations on wild animals as they adapt to the descent into darkness and

cold. We experience this season alongside them, and together with them are filled with an awareness that darkness is not the end, but the preparation for a new beginning. We await in hope for a season of light.

Boss draws on ancient Christian tradition that moves in step with the natural world. She tells of the box turtle who sinks to the bottom-mud of her pond, taking in no oxygen for six months, waiting, depleted...waiting. "It's this radical simplicity that will save her," and within that quietude, Boss finds "something we might call trust: that one day, yes, the world will warm again, and with it, her life." The wood frog, chill seeping in and snaking through his body, breathes more slowly, until one day, he does not wake. He must wait until a warm day in spring for the ice to leave the pond, and his blood. Then, "with dozens of other wood frogs he'll hop to the pond and send up a thrilling chorus: *Death, we've robbed you of your ruin, we've taken you in.*"

The black bear, the muskrat, the chickadee, the whitetail deer, the honey bee, the little brown bat, the opossum, the woodchuck, the garter snake, the skunk—all provide vivid metaphors for this season of darkness and hope. The book is written in such a way that readers, too, will find themselves slowing down, breathing deeply, listening expectantly. Old and young will be entranced by this cast of characters, and better prepared for this season of preparation.

Kayt Frisch

In the years following college, I discovered the power of the liturgical year—particularly the season of Advent. Growing up, the time leading up to Christmas always felt extra-deserving of attention. In late elementary school, I read Madeline L'Engle's book *The 24 Days Before Christmas* and was inspired to try to get my family to do one "Christmas-y" thing each day. Usually the things we would do were making cookies, decorating the Christmas tree, or putting up the nativity set—getting the trappings ready for Christmas. Now, as an adult with small children of my own, I have been reflecting on the sense of anticipation built by that tradition while also weighing it considering the significance of Advent. Advent is the season of the church year where we eagerly await the

Messiah. Rhythms and rituals are important for everyone, and they are particularly powerful for young children. One of my goals as a parent is to help my children anticipate Christmas but to do so in a way that focuses on Advent and the central story while minimizing the contemporary consumer mindset. Towards this end, last year we started using an eBook called *The Truth in Tinsel: An Advent Experience for Little Hands*. Each day from December 1 to 24 (which I realize is not strictly Advent) focuses on a theme (e.g. light of the world) or a character (e.g. Zechariah) in the story of Scripture. Each day has a Scripture passage to read, an (easy!) ornament craft for small hands to do, some text to help you talk about the story with your kids, and then another activity that you can do together (e.g. go into a dark room and light a candle). The ornament is an image or person from the day's story, so it is an experiential way for kids to engage with the story. The author says the book is aimed at pre-school through elementary ages, but last year my then 2.5-year-old son (definitely not yet a preschooler) enjoyed many of the activities. I think this year he will get much more out of it. I am also looking forward to doing these activities and readings year after year as my children move into elementary school—hopefully building a rhythm, a sense of anticipation, and a Christ-centered family tradition for the season of Advent.